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The High Rates of March of a Regiment

by

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The tempos of forced marches depend to a great extent on the availability and state of roads and good organization of the traffic control service. The opinion exists that the repair and protection of roads and the organization of the traffic control service should be the responsibility of the higher staffs. But in practice, the troops have to find their own means and methods still, as in the past, of road support which would correspond to the requirements of modern combat.

Traffic control detachments (otryad obespecheniya dvizheniya - OOD) being created at present and subunits which are being brought in to carry out traffic control service, are often unable to ensure high march tempo. Moreover, these elements, as well as the unwieldy system of protecting a regiment on the march, often act as a brake which restrains the march capabilities of the units, decreases their mobility, combat preparedness, and combat effectiveness. For confirmation, let us examine an example of the makeup of a regiment's march formation.

As a rule, a reconnaissance element moves in front of the main forces of the regiment within means of communication range. It is followed by: an OOD (usually a rifle company and a platoon or company of combat engineers); a traffic control subunit (during a march of a considerable distance--up to a rifle company and more); an advance party sent out by the advance guard, and the advance guard proper. Thus, three or more rifle companies, reinforced by combat engineers, chemical troops, artillery, tanks, i.e., nearly 1/3 of the regiment, precede the advance guard. If a reinforced company is also detailed into the flank guard, as well as up to a company as a rear outpost, and the antitank reserve will follow between the advance guard and the column of the main forces, then the column of main forces will be reduced to less than half the regimental strength. In view of the fact that the support elements are, as a rule, detailed from various subunits, all the battalions are weakened. This does not by any means improve the maintenance of high combat effectiveness and

combat readiness of the regiment. There is no question of ease and reliability of control when the march formation is formed on these lines. Because of the lack of reliable means of control, it is often impossible to give a new task to the OOD and traffic control subunits during a sharp change in the situation. They continue to follow the old route under their own momentum, and have no time to orient themselves in a situation when a meeting engagement takes place.

Calculations and practical experience of certain exercises show that the number of subunits detailed for supporting a march could be reduced, thus improving the mobility and combat effectiveness of a regiment. Let us take, for example, the traffic control detachment (OOD). Detailing it and sending it in advance along the route makes sense in conditions when the march task is received well in advance. Then it will be in a position, using the time before the start of the march, to carry out the necessary work on the route, although in this case the damage of road sectors by enemy aircraft, artillery, and sabotage groups cannot be excluded. Sending ahead an OOD is also advisable when the troops are moving on foot or on vehicles with reduced speeds. In this case the OOD, which has motor transport at its disposal may be sent on ahead quickly to repair the road before the troops move up.

At present, marches may often start without preliminary preparations and be carried out at a rate which will exclude any methodical repairs or the rebuilding of routes. Besides, the extensive possibilities of making use of airborne forces give grounds to presume that the overwhelming majority of marches will be undertaken in the expectation of meeting the enemy, and of a possible change not only of the route, but also of the direction of the movement. In such conditions the detailing of an OOD in advance along the regiment's route of march is either completely excluded or does not make sense, if one considers not only marches being carried out in the rear, but also those which will take place when pursuing the enemy along parallel routes or during the course of a swift advance along independent axes.

There is also no sense in creating an OOD if there is no possibility of sending it ahead in advance, because it will be moving in the immediate vicinity of the advance party (some tens of minutes of movement time) and will certainly not be able to carry out any important repair work along the route in good time.

The advance party (golovnaya pokhodnaya zastava--GPZ) and the advance guard will either be compelled to stop or help the ODD [sic--presumably misprint for OOD].

In modern conditions, the main attention on a march should be given not to the repair of roads and demolished bridges, but to the finding and marking of possible detour routes. The allocation to a regiment of a zone rather than a route (routes) makes it possible to maneuver by using detour routes. It is therefore more advisable to give the commander of the advance guard battalion the whole responsibility for organizing and providing reconnaissance of the route, its repair and rebuilding on the march. For this purpose the battalion should be allotted combat engineer subunits with equipment, structures, and materials. Executing a march, these subunits must move in the battalion column and be ready for immediate operation. Part of the equipment and especially the combat engineer reconnaissance personnel with mine clearance and reconnaissance equipment should be included in the advance party and the point (golovnoy dozor) for the timely reconnaissance of the route and for locating detour routes.

On the basis of reconnaissance data, the commander of the advance guard battalion, either personally or through the commander of the GPZ, organizes and carries out all the arrangements for the road support of a march, using for this purpose partly rifle subunits and combat engineers with their equipment.

This organization of road support of a march and the employment of combat engineer subunits permit the rapid execution of all the necessary work on the route because the commander of the advance guard battalion is always in a position to assess the situation personally and take the necessary steps for ensuring the march. In case of a meeting engagement, the combat engineers subordinate to the battalion commander may be effectively used for the engineer support of the battalion's combat operations.

The situation is no better as far as traffic control on a march is concerned. The existing traffic control subunits in regiments have insufficient personnel to be able to carry out their assigned tasks. Their functions are most often reduced to guarding and servicing the staff and also to the organization of traffic control in the command post area when stationary. For this reason,

fairly often one of the rifle companies is detailed to carry out traffic control service during a march. This leads to an unjustified expenditure of forces. During the course of a march, such a subunit, which moves in front of the advance guard, cannot keep in touch with the commander who has sent it out, because of the restricted range of means of communication. All this renders the control of the subunit's traffic control more difficult, leads to disorganization, and disrupts discipline, and finally reduces the rate of movement of the march. It should be recognized as advisable that the responsibility for organizing traffic control on the route be given to the commander of the advance guard battalion. Besides ease of command, this would also be advantageous from the point of view of the economy of forces.

Experience of exercises in certain units shows that the functions of OOD's, traffic control subunits and the advance party may successfully be entrusted to a single reinforced rifle company. In that case the necessity does not arise to detail subunits from battalions moving in the main force's column, for traffic control and the OOD. As a result, these battalions remain at full strength, while the forces and means detailed to the advance party may in turn carry out various tasks arising during the course of the movement. Thus, in the absence of the enemy, infantrymen may be used to organize traffic control on the route, reconstruct a damaged sector or bridge along with the combat engineers, prepare detours, and in case of meeting the enemy they would, together with reinforcing weapons, cover the deployment of the advance guard. When the advance party is conducting combat, the attached combat engineers may help the rifle company to consolidate and hold the captured line. All this is advantageous because the commander of the advance guard battalion can either reinforce such a unified advance party with forces and weapons of his battalion, or else quickly replace it by another company. If the direction of the movement is changed, he can quickly redirect the advance party and there will be no need for the commander and the staff of the regiment to worry about movement support and traffic control in the new conditions.

The use of subunits detailed for traffic control needs to be better organized. As a rule such a subunit, moving in front of the main force's column of the regiment, posts soldiers and puts up markers at various intervals along the whole route. Such a method calls for a great expenditure of forces and means, especially

when long marches are being carried out, and keeps the subunit detailed for traffic control from carrying out combat tasks for lengthy periods. Besides, it does not ensure conditions for a quick change of the routes and the direction of movement of a regimental column in case of a sharp change in the situation.

The expenditure of manpower, traffic control equipment, and time, under such a system does not depend on the length of the regimental column, but on the length of the route, because such a system provides only for a one-time use of each element. The traffic controller, posted at some road fork before the regimental column starts to pass, is relieved sometime after the last regimental vehicle passes the point in question. The same applies equally to the relief of other forces left on the route--detached support teams on difficult sectors of the route, servicing subunits at river crossings and fords, etc. It follows that not only the time and methods of posting traffic controllers (teams and posts) on the route, but also their relief, should be considered.

When marches are executed at considerable distance, the support service should be organized in such a way that the posting of traffic controllers along the route (teams for the passage of troops through dangerous sectors) and their relief should be carried out simultaneously. For instance, the traffic controllers, the road markers, and the teams for carrying out work and organizing passage through unreliable sectors of the route are posted in succession to begin with by one vehicle moving with the advance party or point, then by another, and so on. As soon as the first vehicle is empty, it stops on the shoulder of the road and waits for the regiment to pass, while the posting of traffic controllers and teams is carried out by a second vehicle, etc. The collection of the posted teams, traffic controllers, and equipment is carried out to begin with by a vehicle which stays behind empty at the starting point. It moves behind the regiment and collects all the personnel and traffic control markers which have been left along the route by the first vehicle. When all the men and equipment dropped by the first vehicle are collected, they are transferred to their own vehicle, and using the first opportunity (usually a halt or a parallel route), overtake the regiment and rejoin their own subunits. The empty vehicle follows the regimental column and thus collects men and equipment dropped by the second vehicle, etc. With this organization, considerable economies of

forces and equipment can be made. Only the required number of traffic controllers and teams, depending on the length of the regimental column, will be engaged at the same time, and this also excludes traffic moving in the opposite direction. During the course of a march, when such a system is applied, it is possible to use the same men and equipment twice or even three times if the march is a lengthy one.

Finally, a few thoughts about flank protection on the march. Roads become more and more important as troops are being mechanized and motorized. It is common knowledge that it is usually difficult to find a road suitable for the movement of a flank party running parallel to the main regimental route some 4 to 6 km away. To send out a party which would operate at a greater distance is out of the question, and it is not advisable to make it move across country, because it would then quickly lag behind the main forces of the regiment. In addition, a flank party on the march has very limited possibilities of detecting an enemy operating outside the route which it follows.

In our view it would be more advisable to send out reconnaissance patrols to the flanks. On the roads and specific directions which lead to the route and from which the enemy may be expected, a static security detachment of limited strength should be sent. These elements could also be sent out by the advance guard on orders from the commander or the chief of staff of the regiment, and in some cases on the decision of the commander of the advance guard battalion.

Constant and firm control of the whole march formation exerts an equally important influence on the rate of the execution of a march and on efficiency during the move. Practice shows that with modern means of communication it is not advisable during a march to have the commander of the regiment moving separately from the staff. Thus, if the commander heads the column, of main forces, then the chief of staff, together with the staff, would be more advisedly placed about the center of the column. In this case the commander, having R-105 radiosets with an amplifying unit (blok umoshcheniye) and an R-113, can maintain contact with the reconnaissance element, the advance guard, some of the subunits moving in the column of main forces, and with the chief of staff. The chief of staff, in turn, being in contact with the subunits moving in the tail of the regimental column and with the regimental rear, can control them, passing on the orders and directives of the commander and receive their reports on the progress past lines and the situation on the route.

Such a disposition of control points in a column and the organization of relay radio communications for orders and reports along the column makes it possible for the commander to carry out a constant check on the movement of the battalion columns, receive information on the enemy and, in case of necessity, assign a task to the subordinates in accordance with the situation. This is also useful for deployment. If the subunits moving at the head of the column, in front of the regimental staff, meet the enemy, they can move up to the deployment line without hindrance, and the staff will not have to free the route, which usually takes up time.

In order to maintain security of movement for the march, radio sets are used in such a way that subordinates switch on the set for transmission only after receiving an order or a signal from a superior (for reporting the situation, transmitting a signal, etc.). At all other times they are either listening in or (if there is a possibility of ordering them to switch on by light or sound signal) may be switched off altogether (the sets of some companies and platoons).

Nevertheless, there may naturally be exceptions to the placing of the commander and the staff in the column as recommended. In a number of cases, especially when a meeting engagement is imminent, it is advisable for the commander of the regiment with a group of officers to move with the advance guard battalion, so as to be in a position to make a more rapid appreciation of the situation at the start of combat, and utilize most expediently the forces and means moving up to the field of battle.

In this case it is advisable that the deputy regimental commander or the battalion commander moving at the head of the regimental march formation should head the column of main forces. They would become the communication link between the regimental commander and the chief of staff, who would ensure that tasks are rapidly given to subunits in a meeting engagement.